

National Executive Director.

FLEET RESERVE ASSOCIATION,
April 19, 2018.

Hon. PHIL ROE,
Chairman, House Veterans Affairs Committee,
House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN ROE: The Fleet Reserve Association (FRA) supports the "Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act" (H.R. 299) that would clarify a presumption for filing disability claims with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for ailments associated with exposure to the Agent Orange herbicide during the Vietnam War. FRA believes Congress should recognize that so-called "Blue water" veterans were exposed to Agent Orange herbicide and authorize presumptive status for VA disability claims associated with this exposure.

We understand that the bill will be amended to provide for a fee on VA home loan mortgages to cover the estimated cost for providing the presumption for the "Blue Water" veterans, and this fee will not apply to any veteran with a disability rating.

The Association appreciates your strong leadership on this issue. FRA stands ready to provide assistance in advancing this legislation.

Sincerely,

THOMAS J. SNEE,
National Executive Director.

THE AMERICAN LEGION,
June 22, 2018.

Hon. DAVID VALADAO,
House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE VALADAO: On behalf of the 2 million members of The American Legion, we heartily support the provisions of H.R. 299, legislation to amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify presumptions relating to the exposure of certain veterans who served in the vicinity of the Republic of Vietnam, and for other purposes.

This legislation, as written, includes as part of the Republic of Vietnam its territorial seas for purposes of the presumption of service connection for diseases associated with exposure by veterans to certain herbicide agents while in Vietnam. It also includes American servicemen who served in the Korean demilitarized zone (DMZ) between September 1, 1967 and August 31, 1971.

The American Legion strongly supports legislation to expand the presumption of Agent Orange exposure to any military personnel who served on any vessel during the Vietnam War that came within 12 nautical miles of the coastlines of Vietnam, as well as in the Korean DMZ between 1967 and 1971. Our organization feels that our nation's defenders should receive the full benefits to which they are entitled.

Through Resolution No. 35, Agent Orange, passed at the 2016 National Convention, The American Legion supports legislation "to amend title 38, United States Code, section 1116, to provide entitlement to these presumptions for those veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange while serving in areas other than the Republic of Vietnam where Agent Orange was tested, sprayed, or stored."

Thank you again for your continued commitment to the men and women in uniform and the nation's veterans and for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

DENISE ROHAN,
National Commander, The American Legion.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, the VA estimates that there are 6.6 million living Vietnam-era veterans; there are 58,220 who died in that war;

and there only will be about 4.4 million remaining in just 10 short years. That means we will lose 2.2 million Vietnam-era veterans in the next 10 years, which is an average of about 523 Vietnam-era veterans per day.

We must now act because, if we don't, blue water Navy veterans may not be around to receive the benefits they and their loved ones have been waiting on for so long. We owe it to the brave men and women veterans who served offshore during the Vietnam era to cease waiting on perfect science and provide compensation benefits for conditions they may have developed because of exposure to Agent Orange.

I am not the only one who believes this. H.R. 299 has broad bipartisan support: 330 cosponsors. I think I can speak for all of us when I say that H.R. 299, as amended, does the right thing for our blue water Navy veterans.

Mr. Speaker, this is personal for our Vietnam-era veterans like myself. I served and walked the territory not long after in Korea, over 40 years ago.

We have done great work on the committee: We passed an accountability bill this year, a way to speed up disability claims. The Forever GI Bill funded the Veterans Choice Program. We just passed the VA MISSION Act, just a few of the things that our committee in a bipartisan way, has done.

But there is a little inconvenience out there that we have 90,000 blue water Navy veterans who are being left behind—not after today.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the other side of the aisle. We worked hand in hand.

And I thank the staffs—I don't think they get enough credit—for the hard work that the staffs do behind the scenes. When we seem to find a blind alley and can't get to a conclusion, they continue to work in a bipartisan way to find a way to get to yes.

I also thank all of the outside groups that kept this issue in front of us for decades.

When I got the chairmanship a year and a half ago, I said one of the things that I will base my chairmanship on is if we can get this solved and do the right thing for our blue water Navy veterans. Today, we are going to do the right thing in this House and send it to the Senate, where they will do the right thing.

Mr. Speaker, once again, I encourage all Members to support H.R. 299, as amended, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. ROE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 299, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further pro-

ceedings on this motion will be postponed.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until approximately 6:30 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 5 o'clock and 15 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1830

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. RUTHERFORD) at 6 o'clock and 30 minutes p.m.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, proceedings will resume on motions to suspend the rules previously postponed.

Votes will be taken in the following order:

H.R. 299, by the yeas and nays;

H.R. 5783, by the yeas and nays.

The first electronic vote will be conducted as a 15-minute vote. The second electronic vote will be conducted as a 5-minute vote.

BLUE WATER NAVY VIETNAM VETERANS ACT OF 2018

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The unfinished business is the vote on the motion to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 299) to amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify presumptions relating to the exposure of certain veterans who served in the vicinity of the Republic of Vietnam, and for other purposes, as amended, on which the yeas and nays were ordered.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. ROE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, as amended.

The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were—yeas 382, nays 0, not voting 45, as follows:

[Roll No. 289]

YEAS—382

Abraham	Biggs	Bucshon
Adams	Bilirakis	Budd
Aderholt	Bishop (GA)	Burgess
Aguilar	Bishop (MI)	Bustos
Allen	Bishop (UT)	Butterfield
Amash	Blum	Byrne
Amodei	Blumenauer	Calvert
Arrington	Blunt Rochester	Capuano
Babin	Bonamici	Cárdenas
Bacon	Bost	Carson (IN)
Banks (IN)	Boyle, Brendan	Carter (GA)
Barletta	F.	Carter (TX)
Barr	Brady (TX)	Cartwright
Barragán	Brat	Castor (FL)
Barton	Brooks (AL)	Castro (TX)
Bass	Brooks (IN)	Chabot
Beatty	Brown (MD)	Cheney
Bera	Brownley (CA)	Cicilline
Bergman	Buchanan	Clark (MA)
Beyer	Buck	Clay